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Pam Purdon
Headteacher
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Dear Mrs Purdon

Special measures monitoring inspection of Howitt Primary Community School

Following my visit with Peter Heaton, Additional Inspector, to your school on 27–28 March 2014, I write on behalf of Her Majesty’s Chief Inspector of Education, Children’s Services and Skills to confirm the inspection findings. Thank you for the help you gave during the inspection and for the time you made available to discuss the actions which have been taken since the school’s previous monitoring inspection.

The inspection was the second monitoring inspection since the school became subject to special measures following the inspection which took place in October 2013. The full list of the areas for improvement which were identified during that inspection is set out in the annex to this letter. The monitoring inspection report is attached.

Having considered all the evidence, I am of the opinion that at this time:

The school is making reasonable progress towards the removal of special measures.

The school may not appoint newly qualified teachers before the next monitoring inspection.

This letter and monitoring inspection report will be published on the Ofsted website. I am copying this letter and the monitoring inspection report to the Secretary of State, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director of Children’s Services for Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely

David Carter
Her Majesty’s Inspector

Annex

The areas for improvement identified during the inspection which took place in October 2013

- Improve the quality of the teaching so that pupils make at least good progress by ensuring that teachers routinely:
 - make the pace of teaching brisk enough to motivate and challenge all groups of pupils
 - give pupils sufficient time in lessons to work at tasks matched to their levels of ability
 - ensure that boys take as full part in lessons as girls and get on quickly with their work
 - check that pupils eligible for the pupil premium are fully supported in their learning
 - provide work that is challenging but achievable for disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs
 - make detailed assessments and use information and communication technology effectively to support the younger children.

- Improve the impact of leadership and management by:
 - ensuring that all senior leaders and governors regularly check the quality of teaching and learning
 - giving clear information to teachers on how they can improve their skills
 - allowing teachers opportunities to learn from the best teaching in this and other schools
 - holding teachers to account for the progress of different groups of pupils such as boys, pupils eligible for the pupil premium, disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs
 - ensuring that all teachers follow and apply the guidance in the behaviour policy
 - improving attendance, particularly of pupils eligible for the pupil premium
 - setting targets in the school improvement plan that focus on underachieving groups.

Ofsted will make recommendations for action on governance to the authority responsible for the school. An external review of governance, to include a specific focus on the school's use of the pupil premium should be undertaken to assess how this aspect of leadership and management may be improved.

Report on the second monitoring inspection on 27–28 March 2014

Evidence

During this inspection, meetings were held with: the headteacher and other senior leaders; a representative of the local authority; members of the governing body; and a group of eight pupils from Key Stage 2. Inspectors visited lessons and looked at a range of pupils' work. Inspectors considered the school's most recent data on the attainment and progress of groups of pupils.

Context

Four new governors have been appointed since January 2014. The governing body has appointed a teacher who joined the school at the beginning of the spring term in order to lead the Nursery.

Achievement of pupils at the school

Pupils' attainment in English and mathematics at the end of Year 6 in 2013 was significantly below the national average. This was because all pupils, including disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs, boys, and those eligible for support via the pupil premium, made inadequate rates of progress during their time in Key Stage 2.

Teacher assessments of pupils currently in Year 6 indicate that past underachievement is beginning to be overcome. The attainment of Year 6 pupils in reading and writing is closer to the national average than in the previous two years and pupils are now making expected rates of progress in English. Although the attainment of Year 6 pupils in mathematics is below average, their progress has begun to increase. The vast majority of pupils in Years 3, 4 and 5 are making accelerated progress in reading. Pupils' progress in writing and mathematics is improving in Years 4 and 5; however, pupils in Year 3 are not making the same rates of progress at this stage in the academic year. Pupils in Year 2 are making better rates of progress this term. Pupils in Year 1 and children in the Reception classes, however, are not making the same rates of progress as other pupils in the school. Although this is beginning to improve, this is a priority for school leaders. Children in the Nursery classes are making a better start to their education.

Pupils eligible for support via the pupil premium are now making similar rates of progress to their classmates. Despite this improvement, gaps in attainment remain wide in Years 5 and 6. In other classes, eligible pupils are about two terms behind their classmates in terms of their attainment.

The school has begun to more regularly assess the progress made by disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. The initial evidence shows that these pupils have recently started to improve their rates of progress. Leaders' analysis

shows that boys are making similar rates of progress to girls in reading, writing and mathematics.

The quality of teaching

In the Nursery, Year 2 and Key Stage 2, teaching is becoming more effective and helping pupils to make faster rates of progress. Teachers have a better understanding of the progress of individuals and groups of pupils; in particular, those eligible for the pupil premium. They are using this information to focus planning more accurately on the knowledge and skills that pupils need to develop. This has been helped by the recently introduced approach to planning pupils' learning in English and mathematics more consistently. This provides a stronger framework for teaching because it is clearer what pupils of different abilities are expected to achieve by the end of lessons and over time.

The quality of learning environments has improved and pupils are able to draw upon a wider range of resources, including those displayed on walls and others on their desks, to help them in their learning. Learning is being presented in a more interesting way through topics, and boys, in particular, are more engaged in their learning. These new approaches are being used with greater consistency and confidence by teachers and are understood better by pupils.

In the Reception and Year 1 classes, assessment information is not yet used as precisely as in other year groups in order to ensure that pupils are provided with sufficient challenge. As a result, pupils are not always engaged in their learning. The use of information and communication technology is beginning to be used more effectively in this part of the school in order to help pupils develop their skills. Children in Reception are not always given enough chance to develop their skills in communication, reading and writing, particularly when learning without the direct supervision of an adult.

Teachers and teaching assistants are working more closely to provide more bespoke support to disabled pupils and those who have special educational needs. Teachers' marking of pupils work continues to become more consistent. Marking is more frequent and now informs lesson-planning daily. It has recently improved further by creating time for pupils to respond to teachers' comments or questions.

Behaviour and safety of pupils

Pupils' attitudes to learning have continued to improve. Pupils say that the new behaviour code has helped to make it clearer the incentives for good behaviour and learning, and the sanctions if they decide to not follow the rules. As a result, pupils are increasingly motivated to achieve rewards. Teachers' expectations of pupils' behaviour is higher and the behaviour management policy is being adhered to by most staff. This has resulted in reduction in the number of incidents of bullying.

Pupils confirm that the number of incidents of poor behaviour has reduced. As a result, pupils feel safer at break times and during lessons. Boys, in particular, are more engaged in their learning because, increasingly, activities are planned which sustain their interest and attention. Attendance continues to rise since the previous inspection.

The quality of leadership in and management of the school

The headteacher has provided authoritative leadership which has improved the morale of staff and engagement of pupils. She has led the introduction of new approaches which have accelerated the rate of improvement. Clear guidance relating to displays in corridors and classrooms has helped to communicate higher expectations of what pupils can achieve and have set a more positive climate for learning. Teachers have used a common approach to the planning of teaching which has helped to bring about a greater consistency in ensuring that pupils of different abilities are provided with work which challenges them. Senior leaders have checked more frequently on the quality of teaching through visits to lessons and have provided teachers with advice on how they can improve their practice. Staff have benefitted from observing each other and visiting teachers in other schools. Teachers are beginning to be held to closer account for their progress of their pupils through regular meetings which focus on the achievement of individuals and groups of pupils. All of these approaches have helped to raise teachers' expectations of what can be achieved. As a result, teaching is improving.

Leaders of English and mathematics have begun to check on the quality of teaching by scrutinising teachers' planning, checking on pupils' work and considering information relating to pupils' assessments. Although they are not yet drawing together information sharply enough to provide individual teachers with precise recommendations on how they can improve their teaching, their findings are helping to identify general aspects of practice which are strengths and those which require further improvement. For instance, leaders recognise that pupils do not have the same awareness of their targets in mathematics as they do in English. Consequently, pupils are less aware of what they have to do next to reach the next level of attainment.

The special educational needs coordinators are keeping a closer eye on the progress made by vulnerable pupils and are beginning to check the extent to which intervention programmes are impacting upon pupils' achievements. The leader of the Early Years Foundation Stage is beginning to work more closely with the recently appointed leader of the Nursery in order to check the quality of provision. The recently introduced electronic assessment system is helping leaders of the Early Years Foundation Stage to gather more information about children's learning in order to help them make more accurate assessments of children's achievement. Both leaders recognise the need to improve the accuracy of adults' assessments of

children's learning in order to help them provide activities which will help children to develop their skills at a faster rate, especially in communication, reading and writing.

Governors have undertaken an external review of governance as well as the use of the pupil premium. Governors have a better understanding of their roles and responsibilities but they are still awaiting training on how to interpret data relating to pupils' achievements. Consequently, they are limited in the extent to which they can hold senior leaders to account for the rate of improvement. Governors and staff have a better understanding of the achievement of pupils eligible for support via the pupil premium. This is because senior leaders have tracked their progress closely and have set targets in order to narrow the gap in attainment between eligible pupils and their classmates.

External support

The local authority continues to provide effective support to the school. The local authority adviser visits the school frequently and provides helpful support in checking the quality of teaching and in supporting the headteacher. Teaching and learning consultants have worked closely with the leaders of English and mathematics in order to develop their skills in checking on the quality of teaching through scrutinising pupils' work and visiting lessons.

Staff have benefitted from visiting other schools, notably Sudbury Primary School and North Wingfield Primary School. These visits have helped to raise teachers' expectations relating to the quality of display and what pupils can achieve during lessons and over time.